

Gorbachov assumes emergency powers

by Konstantin George

On Sept. 23, the Soviet Parliament granted President Mikhail Gorbachov sweeping emergency powers which took effect immediately, and will last through March 1992, when the planned "transition to a market economy" is supposed to be completed. According to TASS, Gorbachov received the power, "in accordance with the Constitution, to issue decrees on questions of property relations, administering the national economy, the budget, finances, wages, pricing policies, as well as affirming law and order."

The only alternative to these measures was the certain descent into chaos, if the economic reform program and its social-economic dislocations were not accompanied by strict state intervention to regulate the course of events. The plunge into chaos would end the still-fragile proto-democratic process that has begun in Russia and other republics, and ensure a return to absolutist rule under civil war-like conditions.

A crucial consideration behind the decision on a system of emergency powers and rule by decree, is the need to guarantee enough stability to allow desperately needed foreign, above all German, investment, for the rapid modernization and development of Soviet industry, agriculture, and infrastructure. In a Sept. 24 statement, Presidential Council member Aleksandr Yakovlev stressed that Gorbachov's powers included issuing decrees guaranteeing and promoting foreign investment, and that no "dissolution of Parliament" would occur.

Gorbachov rejected calls by deputies for the resignation of the government of Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, and Yakovlev was quoted by Radio Moscow on Sept. 25: "To change the government now would be tantamount to suicide."

Europeanization option

Within hours of the Soviet Parliament's vote for economic reform, the German government hailed the historic vote. Signaling that a flow of German assistance and investment will be coming, a German government spokesman declared that Chancellor Helmut Kohl welcomes "the Soviet Union's decision for a rapid transition to a market economy, through which the preconditions have been created for joint Western aid." The first deeds followed almost instantly, when a German banking consortium, led by Deutsche Bank, announced a new DM 5 billion credit and financial stabilization package for the Soviet Union.

Moscow and Bonn announced on Sept. 26 that the agreements already worked out—including the 20-year economic and political cooperation treaty, the agreements covering the

Soviet troop withdrawals, and the phasing out of the Soviet presence on German soil—would all be initialed in Bonn, before formal unification on Oct. 3. The formal signing will occur soon thereafter.

In contrast, the Anglo-American policy of promoting economic destabilization was expressed by President Bush, in his address to the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington on Sept. 25: "One cannot allow the brutal behavior of an aggressor [Iraq] to undermine the historic process of democratic change, or derail the movement towards a system of market economy" in Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R. As Bush well knows, the "undermining" and "derailing" is being caused by the U.S. blockade of Iraq, which has wreaked havoc with the economies of Eastern Europe.

Prospects of a 'winter of hunger'

The Soviet Union is bracing itself for a winter of hunger and deprivation. As *Pravda* reported Sept. 26, only 3.7% of Moscow's winter potato requirements have been stored, and similar figures were given for needed stocks of cabbage, beets, and other vegetables. Russian cities depend on their surrounding farm regions for these winter staples, and the harvest has been crippled by severe rural labor shortages. Starting Sept. 10, the Soviet Army was deployed into farm regions to pull in the crops. It was this emergency deployment which provided the basis for a well-orchestrated media campaign warning of a "military coup."

The "coup" warnings began Sept. 11 with a statement by Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin, and were continued by his followers among the Democratic Forum group of parliamentarians, who attacked Gorbachov for having too much power.

Then on Sept. 25, TASS issued a commentary accusing the Democratic Forum, and Moscow's and other city councils controlled by it, of deliberately having caused the chaos in food supplies and distribution in order to incite dissatisfaction and pave the way "for an anti-constitutional, counterrevolutionary coup." *Pravda* printed a document they claimed was from the Democratic Forum, describing an alleged project for "nationwide strikes and undermining of the power structure, which doesn't stop at nationality conflicts . . . to achieve its destructive goals." The goals were described as "the overthrow of the government and later of President Gorbachov."

A military coup, now, or very soon, is out of the question. It would sabotage that which the military cherishes most, a German-led investment infusion to modernize the economy. A coup exists as an option, if, during the heart of winter, the system of rule by decree proves insufficient to prevent chaos—though even then, the more likely version of this would be the one the Yeltsin group is warning about: Gorbachov's employing the Army as the final arbiter of law, order, and stability.